

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
29 September 2005 (29.09.2005)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2005/089286 A2

(51) International Patent Classification: **Not classified**

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2005/008476

(22) International Filing Date: 15 March 2005 (15.03.2005)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
60/552,718 15 March 2004 (15.03.2004) US

(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **AMERICA ONLINE, INC.** [US/US]; 22000 AOL Way, Dulles, VA 20166 (US).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **GREENBERG, Steven** [US/US]; 6702 Jefferson Blvd, Frederick, MD 21703 (US). **APPELMAN, Barry** [US/US]; 1003 Crest Lane, McLean, VA 22101 (US).

(74) Agent: **RENNER, W., Karl**; Fish & Richardson P.C., 1425 K Street, N.W., 11th Floor, Washington, DC 20005-3500 (US).

(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

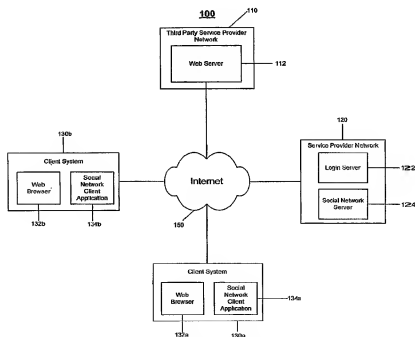
(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: **SHARING SOCIAL NETWORK INFORMATION**



(57) Abstract: Social network information may be shared across online service providers. Thus, one online service provider M that maintains a membership separate from a second online service provider N may nevertheless use the social network maintained by the second online service provider N to tailor content and/or services based on such social network information.



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

SHARING SOCIAL NETWORK INFORMATION

TECHNICAL FIELD

This description relates to social networking.

BACKGROUND

Users of an online service provider who do not have a direct relationship to one another may nevertheless be linked to one another through intermediate entities based on a personal, business or other relationship among the users and the intermediate entities. For example, a user A may have a friend, user B, who also uses that same online service provider and who has a business relationship with user C who also uses the same online service provider. Thus, user A is linked to user C through user B. Such interpersonal interactions or relationships may generally be referred to as a social network. The number of intermediate entities needed to link one entity/user to another may generally be referred to as the degrees of separation between those two entities/users. The social network may be tracked and maintained by the online service provider. The online service provider may generate a social network by observing which users communicate with one another, may build it from user created contact lists or address books, or may ask the users to explicitly create their networks. Social networks may also provide a mechanism for tracking online reputations, and help the users estimate how much to trust one another.

SUMMARY

In general, social network information may be shared across online service providers. Thus, for instance, one online service provider *M* that maintains a membership separate from a second online service provider *N* may nevertheless use the social network maintained by the second online service provider *N* to tailor content and/or services based on such social network information.

Accordingly, in one aspect, social network information from a first online service provider network may be used to modify content or services provided by a second online service provider network. A request for social network information related to a user is sent to a first online service provider network. The social network information related to

the user is received and content or services provided by the second online service provider network are modified based on the social network information.

Implementations of this aspect may include one or more of the following features. For example, a social network id associated with a username for the user at the first
5 online service provider network may be received and the request for the social network information may include the social network id. The first online service provider network then may determine the social network information related to the user based on this social network id.

Similarly, a social network id associated with a username for a second user at the
10 first online service provider may be received as part of a web page provided by the second online service provider network. The social network id may be associated with content in the web page added by the second user or contact information for the second user in the web page. The request for social network information related to the user may include this social network id and a username for the user at the first online service
15 provider network. The first online service provider network then may determine the social network information related to the user based on the social network id and the username of the user. The web page then may be modified based on the social network information.

Modifying the web page may include highlighting or changing the position of the content added to the web page by the second user and/or highlighting the contact
20 information for the second user in the web page. The web page may be modified based on the degrees of separation between the user and the second user. For instance, modifying the web page may additionally or alternatively include displaying a visual cue in proximity to the content added to the web page by the second user, or the contact
25 information for the second user in the web page, where the visual cue indicates the number of degrees of separation between the user and the user requesting the web page. Similarly, modifying the web page may alternatively or additionally include changing the position of the content added to the web page by the second user based on the number of degrees of separation between the user and the second user.

Reputation information for the second user may be used to modify the web page
30 or other content or services. For instance, the social network information may include a value representing a reputation of the second user among members of a social network

including the user. The web page then may be modified, for example, by displaying a visual cue that indicates the value of the reputation for the second user, and/or by changing the position of the content added to the web page by the second user based on the value representing the reputation of the second user.

5 An application, for example, may log into the first online service provider network under a username for the user established at the first online service provider network. The username and an identifier of a server, for example, a web server on the second online service provider network, may be sent to the first online service provider network by the application. The first online service provider network may generate a social
10 network id based on the username and identifier and associates the social network id with the username. The application then may receive the social network id from the first online service provider network and sending the social network id to the server on the second online service provider network. That server then may associate the social network id with an account for the user maintained by the second online service provider.

15 The second online service provider network may maintain a first social network having members including the user. In addition, the social network information received from the first online service provider network may include information regarding members of a second social network that includes the user maintained by the first online service provider network. The members of the first social network may be linked to
20 members of the second social network using the received information regarding members of the first social network.

 The user may be one, for example, that has requested the content or services provided by the second online service provider network, that has added content to the content or content or services provided by the second online service provider network, or
25 that is a user whose contact information is display in the content or services provided by the second online service provider.

 In another aspect, a social network server maintained on a online service provider network includes a processor and memory that stores instructions for causing the processor to perform particular operations. As a result of those instructions, the social
30 network server may maintain data indicating one or more social networks for members of the online service provider network. The social network server also may receive a request

from a system that is separate from the online service provider network for social network information related to a user. The social network server may determine the social network information related to the user based on the data indicating one or more social network maps and make the determined social network information related to the user accessible to the system that is separate from the online service provider network.

Implementations of this aspect may include one or more of the following features. For instance, the system that is separate from the online service provider network may be a client system or a server maintained on a second online service provider network. The social network server may receive, from the system that is separate from the online service provider network, a request for a social network id for the user, generate a social network id for the user, associate the social network id with a username, and send the generated social network id to the system that is separate from the online service provider network.

The request for the social network id may include the username and an identification of a server maintained on a second online service provider network. The social network server may generate the social network id based on the username and the identification of the server maintained on the second online service provider network. A request for social network information may include the social network id and the social network id may be used with the data indicating the one or more social networks to determine the social network information.

Implementations of the techniques discussed herein may include hardware, a method or process, or computer software on a computer-accessible medium. The details of one or more implementations are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below.

Other features will be apparent from the description and drawings, and from the claims.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an example of a networked computing environment in which social network information may be shared between online service providers.

FIG. 2A is a flowchart showing a process for determining a user's social network.

FIG. 2B is a diagram showing an example of a social network list.

FIG. 2C is a diagram showing the social network corresponding to FIG. 2B in graphical form.

FIGS. 3A-3D, collectively, show the communications and a process that may be performed when a user registers with the web server of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 4A-4C, collectively, show the communications and process that may be performed when a user retrieves a web page from the web server of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 5A-6C show various ways in which a web page may be modified according to social network information.

FIGS. 7A and 7B, collectively, show another implementation of the communications and process that may be performed when a user retrieves a web page from the web server of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 8A-8B, collectively, show another implementation that permits a third party service provider network to maintain a social network for the members of the third online service provider network.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The techniques described in this document may allow social network information to be shared across online service providers. Thus, one online service provider *M* that maintains a membership separate from a second online service provider *N* may nevertheless use the social network maintained by the second online service provider *N* to tailor content and/or services based on such social network information.

Generally, the terms “member,” “user,” and “entity” are used interchangeably throughout this description. These terms, however, should not be seen as limited to a person. For example, an organization, such as a corporation, also may use the services provided by an online service provider. Consequently, these terms should be seen as encompassing any entity, actual, legal, or otherwise, that uses a service provider network.

In general, entities may be members of an online service provider. The online service provider may maintain a network that provides its members with content and/or one or more communication services, such as chat, instant messaging (IM), e-mail, message boards, and member directories. An entity may use a client application to

connect to the online service provider's network through a global network such as the Internet and to logon to the online service provider's network by providing a screenname (otherwise referred to as a username) and password that have previously been established with the online service provider. Once the entity is authenticated, the client application may be used by the entity to access the content and communication services provided by the online service provider's network. The communication services may allow the entity to communicate with other members of the online service provider. The online service provider may provide access to different communications services depending on a level of access granted to the entity and/or based on the client application used by the entity to connect to the online service provider's network.

America Online, Inc. of Dulles, Virginia is an example of an online service provider that maintains an online service provider network. America Online® allows entities who subscribe to the America Online® service to connect to the America Online® network using the AOL® client application. These entities are then able to access the proprietary content and communication services provided by the America Online® network. Some of the content and communication services (for example, message boards) are only available to entities who subscribe to the America Online® service and who connect to the America Online® network using the AOL® client application. America Online® also provides instant messaging services to entities, regardless of whether they subscribe to the America Online® service, through the AOL instant messaging (AIM®) client application. An entity may use the AIM® client application to connect to the America Online® network and to use the instant messaging services provided by the America Online® network. More generally, an online service provider network refers to one or more servers that provide some online service or content that users register to use or view.

Members of an online service provider may use the online service to maintain user contact lists (e.g., address books or instant messaging contact lists). For example, the AIM® client application allows a user to maintain a contact list (referred to as a Buddy List®) that includes the screennames of the entities to whom the user of the AIM® client desires to send instant messages.

Such contact lists may be evaluated to determine the links and the degrees of separation between two entities. For example, entity A may list entity B in entity A's instant messaging contact list, entity B may list entity C in entity B's instant messaging contact list, and entity C may list entity D in entity C's instant messaging contact list.

Here, entity B is zero degrees of separation away from A (that is, there are no intermediate nodes between them). Entity C is one degree of separation away from A (they are separated by B). Entity D is two degrees of separation away from A (they are linked via entities B and C).

The online service provider may automatically map a first entity's social network (e.g., the entire social network or up to a designated number of degrees of separation), for example, by evaluating the first entity's contact list(s) and then successively evaluating the contact list(s) of those entities listed in the first entity's contact list until the desired number of degrees have been reached or until the entire network has been mapped. For example, entity A may list entities B and C in entity A's instant messaging contact list. A system may evaluate and determine that entities B and C are so listed and construct a social network map that indicates that entities B and C are linked to entity A. The online service provider may then evaluate the contact lists of entities B and C to determine the entities to which entities B and C are linked. For example, the system may determine that entity B's instant messaging contact list includes entities D and E, and, consequently, that B is linked to D and E. The system then may refine the social network map to indicate that A is linked directly to B and C and is also linked to D and E through B. The online service provider may additionally or alternatively use other techniques to map a social network. For example, the online service provider may observe which users communicate with one another and/or may ask the users to explicitly create their networks

The online service provider may store such information about its members as a social network map, graph, or list. The online service provider may make such social network information available to third party service provider networks (i.e., networks of one or more servers that provide content or services separate from those provided by the online service provider, such as, for example, a web server that is separate from the online service provider's network).

For example, in one implementation, a client system may execute a social network client application that logs into the online service provider's network. The client system also may execute a web browser that requests a web page from a third party web server. The web page may include social network display code. The social network display code may communicate with the social network client application to request social network information regarding the user of the client system. The social network client application then may use an application programming interface to retrieve social network information for the user of the client system from a social network server on the online service provider network. The social network client application then returns the social network information to the social network display code of the web page, which modifies the web page based on the social network information. Thus, the web page, for example, can be modified based upon the social network relationship between the viewer of the web page and the creator of content in the web page, or the user corresponding to contact information displayed in the web page content.

For instance, if the web page provides newsgroup posts, or other content that is added by users of the website, the social network display code may change the order of the posts based on the social network information. The social network display code may, for instance, move posts added by the users in the client system user's social network to the top of the web page and/or may order them based on the number of degrees of separation between the user who added the post and the client system user. The social network code may alternatively or additionally order the posts based on the posting user's reputation in the social network of the client system user. Ordering or otherwise changing the position of added content on a web page based on the social network information may, for example, help alleviate problems related to spam content or posts.

As another example, a visual cue may be displayed to an entity viewing contact or other information displayed on a web page to represent another entity. The visual cue may directly indicate the degrees of separation between the entity whose contact information is displayed and the entity who is viewing the contact information, may display the pathway between the two, and/or indicate reputation information. For example, if a potential buyer A is reading a post by a seller B (where the post displays seller B's contact information) on an online auction site (such as the online auction

provided by eBay Inc. of San Jose, California), and buyer A is linked to seller B by six degrees of separation, then a visual cue may be displayed in association with seller B's contact information to indicate to buyer A that entities A and B are linked and separated by six degrees of separation. The visual cue may alternatively or additionally indicate whether members of user A's social network have marked user B with a positive or negative reputation.

Similarly, if a job hunter A is reading a post by an employer B (where the post displays entity B's contact information) on an employment website, and the job hunter A and employer B are separated by three degrees of separation, a visual cue may indicate that they are separated by three degrees and may additionally or alternatively indicate the path between the two. Providing such information may make a buyer more comfortable buying from the seller, in the case of an online auction, or, in the case of the employment website, may provide information about contacts that can be leveraged by the job hunter to obtain employment with the employer or help the employer determine whether to hire the job seeker.

FIG. 1 shows an example of a networked computing environment 100 in which social network information maintained by one online service provider network 120 may be made available to modify the content and/or services provided by a third party online service provider network 110. Computing environment 100 includes client systems 130a and 130b, service provider network 120, and a third party service provider network 110 interconnected by a network 150, such as the Internet.

Service provider network 120 may be one like the network provided by America Online®. However, as described above, an online service provider network more generally refers to one or more servers that provide some online service or content that users register to use or view. For example, social network websites, such as the ones provided by Tribe Networks, Inc. of San Francisco, California (located at www.tribe.net) and LinkedIn Corporation of Palo Alto, California (located at www.linkedin.com), may be referred to as online service provider networks. Users register with these websites to obtain a username and password, which the users then use to log onto these websites to access the social network services provided by these websites. As another example, some websites (such as web logs or websites that provide access to newsgroups or forums)

allow users to post comments or other content. Before such websites allow users to post content, the websites typically require users to register with the website to obtain credentials, such as a username and password, which the user then uses to log into the website and post content.

5 Service provider network 120 includes a login server 122 that allows a client application to log into service provider network 120 using, for example, a screenname and password. The screenname or username used to log into service provider network 120 is referred to as a service provider username. Once the client application is authenticated and logged into the service provider network by login server 122, the client
10 application can then access some or all of the services or content provided by service provider network 120. Service provider network 120 also includes a social network server 124 that determines the social network map(s) or list(s) for members of online service provider network 120 and makes such social network information available for use in modifying a third party provider's content or services, as described further below.

15 Client systems 130a and 130b each include, respectively, a web browser 132a or 132b and a social network client application 134a or 134b. Social network client applications 134a and 134b log into the service provider network 120 using the client system users' credentials and act as intermediaries to obtain social network information for the client system users, as described further below. The social network client
20 applications 134a and 134b may be client applications, such as an instant messaging client or an online service provider client like the AOL® client, used by users to access services or content provided by the service provider network 120. Alternatively, social network client applications 134a and 134b may be applications that simply act as intermediaries to obtain the social network information. Social network client
25 applications 134a and 134b may be plug-ins for web browsers 132a and 132b or other applications, or they may be stand-alone applications or services on client systems 130a and 130b that may or may not have a user interface.

 From the standpoint of the online service provider network 120, network 110 is a third party service provider network(i.e., it provides content and/or services that are not
30 part of service provider network 120). In this example, third party service provider network 110 includes a web server 112. Web server 112 provides web pages, for

example, to web browsers 132a or 132b. The web pages provide content or services that can be viewed or used by the users of client systems 130a and 130b. As further described below, while illustrated as including a web server 112, other implementations of third party service provider network 110 may, in addition or as an alternative to web server 112, include other types of servers that provide content or services, which may or may not be accessed by client applications other than web browsers 132a and 132b. For example, the third party service provider network 110 may include an e-mail server that provides e-mail service that is accessed by an e-mail client, or an instant messaging server that provides instant messaging service to an instant messaging client. Third party online service provider network 110 may be a network similar to the AOL® network. Third party online service provider 110 may maintain its own social network for the members of third party service provider network 110.

To obtain the content or services from third party service provider network 110, a user, such as the user of client system 130a, first registers with web server 112 to establish a username (which is referred to as a third-party username and may be different from the service provider username that is established for service provider network 120) and a password. The username and password are then used by the user of client system 130a to log onto web server 112 and access the content or services. As described more fully below, in one implementation, the web page that is used by the user of client system 130a to register with the web site contains code, such as javascript, that communicates with social network client application 134a to obtain a unique id from social network server 124. The unique id is associated with the service provider username. This unique id is then returned to web server 112 when the user completes the registration and is associated with the user's account information (including the third-party username) stored by web server 112. Thus, for this user, web server 112 now stores both a third party username and a unique id provided by social network server 124. Then, when the user's third party username or other contact information is displayed in a web page, or content is posted to a web page by the user, the unique id is associated with the contact information or content displayed in the web page.

When a second user, such as the user of client system 130b using web browser 132b, subsequently requests a web page that contains the contact information or content

created by the user of system 130a, the associated unique id for the user of system 130a is provided along with that contact information and/or content. The web page provided by web server 112 also includes code, such as javascript, that communicates the unique id to social network client application 134b, which uses the unique id (which is associated with the service provider username of the user of client system 130a) and the service provider username of the user of client system 130b to obtain social network information from social network server 124 regarding the relationship between the user of client system 130a and the user of client system 130b. The code uses this social network information to modify the display of the web page. For instance, if the user of client system 130a is in the social network of the user of client system 130b, the content posted by the user of client system 130a is identified by the associated unique id and may be highlighted or moved to the top of the web page.

Each of the client systems 130a and 130b, web server 112, login server 122, and social network server 124 may be implemented using, for example, a general-purpose computer capable of responding to and executing instructions in a defined manner, a personal computer, a special-purpose computer, a workstation, a server, a device, a component, or other equipment or some combination thereof capable of responding to and executing instructions. Client systems 130a and 130b, web server 112, login server 122, and social network server 124 may receive instructions from, for example, a software application, a program, a piece of code, a device, a computer, a computer system, or a combination thereof, which independently or collectively direct operations, as described herein. The instructions may be embodied permanently or temporarily in any type of machine, component, equipment, storage medium, or propagated signal that is capable of being delivered to client systems 130a and 130b, web server 112, login server 122, or social network server 124.

Network 150 may include the Internet, Wide Area Networks (WANs), Local Area Networks (LANs), analog or digital wired and wireless telephone networks (e.g., a Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), an Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), or a Digital Subscriber Line (xDSL)), or any other wired or wireless network. Network 150 may include multiple networks or subnetworks, each of which may include, for example, a wired or wireless data pathway.

FIG. 2A is a flow chart showing a process 200, which may be performed, for example, by social network server 124, to determine a user's social network. A social network list is maintained for the user (202). The contacts in one or more of the user's contact lists (e.g., the user's instant messaging contact list) are added to the social network list with an indication that the contacts are zero degrees of separation from the user (and, therefore, are directly linked to the user) (204).

Next, the contacts linked to the user through the user's contacts in the contact list (e.g., up to a desired degree of separation) are identified and added to the social network list. To do so, the contact lists of each contact in the user's contact list are accessed (206). The contacts in those lists (i.e., the contacts separated by one degree) then are added to the social network list (208). If another degree of separation is desired (210), the degree of separation is incremented (212) such that the contact lists of the contacts that are separated from the recipient by one degree are accessed (206) and the contacts in those contact lists are added to the social network list (208).

When a contact is added to the social network list, the contact's degree of separation from the user also is added and, in addition, the contact that links the user to the added contact may be stored so that an indication can be provided of the path between the user and the added contact. The addition of contacts continues until the desired degree of separation is reached, at which point the social network list is stored for later use (214).

The above process can be modified in a number of ways. For example, at times it may be desirable to have greater assurance that a relationship actually exists between two users before indicating that the two users are directly linked. That is, the before a first user is included in a social network, it may be desirable to have greater assurance that there is a relationship between the first user and a second user which connects the first user to the social network. In particular implementations, such assurance can be obtained by requiring that two entities list each other in their respective contact lists before the entities are considered as having a relationship (and, therefore, are directly linked). In such implementations, an increased likelihood of a relationship between two users is assumed to exist when the two users list each other in their respective contact lists. Thus, for example, before a second user listed in a first user's contact list is added to the first

user's social network list, the second user's contact list may be accessed to determine if the first user is listed in the second user's contact list. If such a bidirectional link exists, then the second user is added to the first user's social network list.

The contact lists used to develop the social network list or otherwise used to map a social network may be stored centrally or in a distributed fashion. For example, the techniques may be applied to an environment in which all of the users' contact lists are stored on a single server (completely centralized), or on a single cluster of servers owned by the service provider (partially centralized/distributed). The contact lists may be stored in a more fully distributed fashion by being stored on each client system (i.e., each user's contact list is stored on the user's client system). The contact lists may then be accessed by social network server 124 when social network client application 134a or 134b is logged into service provider network 122 and temporarily or permanently stored by social network server 124 to develop the social network lists.

FIG. 2B shows an example of a social network list 216, while FIG. 2C shows the corresponding exemplary social network 218 in graphical form. Social network 218 is for an entity designated as User. User is directly linked to User1 and User2 (User may, for example, have User1 and User2 in User's address book). User1 is linked to User4, while User2 is linked to User3. Consequently, User is linked to User3 (through User2) and User4 (through User1) through one degree of separation. Similarly, User4 is linked to User5 and, consequently, User is linked to User5 (through User 4 and User1) through two degrees of separation.

Social network list 216 for User contains indications of the entities to which User is linked, the degrees of separation between User and the linked entities, and the entities linking the linked entity to the social network 218. For instance, an indication of User5 is included, along with an indication that User5 is two degrees of separation from User. There also is an indication that User4 is the entity that links User5 to social network 218 (and, hence, User). Including the entity linking a particular entity to the social network allows the structure of the social network to be determined from the social network list. As an alternative, the entity linking a particular entity to the social network may be excluded. For instance, the social network list may only contain an indication of the entity and its degrees of separation. The social network may alternatively or additionally

contain more detailed information about the relationships between the users, such as the degree to which particular users trust or distrust other particular users and/or and indication of the strength of the links between users.

While the process described with respect to FIG. 2A determines existing social networks, from, for example, contact lists, other ways of forming, determining, or tracking social networks may alternatively or additionally be used. For instance, instead of determining existing social networks, the online service provider may provide tools to users so that they can positively create social networks for use with the social network websites described above. For instance, the online service provider may support an invite-accept model for forming social networks. In an invite-accept model, to become part of a social network, a user receives an invitation from another user to join the social network (i.e., to be linked to the other user). When the user accepts the invitation, he or she is linked to the other user, and hence, the social network. The online service provider then may use social network lists or other techniques to track the links between members of the various social networks.

An invite-accept model may be used in conjunction with the techniques described above for determining an existing social network using, for example, contact lists. For instance, the social network list may be constructed using contact lists as described above. Then, as the user receives and accepts invitations to join other social networks, the social network list may be updated to include those directly linked users that the user accepted, and the other users linked at further degrees of separation.

In some implementations, the online service provider may observe the communications between users to determine the social network, or to infer the strength of the links between users. For example, the online service provider may observe that two users communicate using instant messaging, and therefore are linked to one another. The online service provider then may observe the frequency of the users' communication to a determine the "strength" of the link between the two. Users' who communicate more frequently, for instance, may have a link with a higher strength than users that communicate less frequently.

FIGS. 3A-3C, collectively, show an example of communications (FIG. 3A) and a process 300 (FIGS. 3B and 3C) that may be performed by web server 112, web browser

132a, social network client 134a, login server 122, and social network server 124 when the user of client system 130a registers with web server 112. Initially, social network client application 134a sends the user's credentials (e.g., a service provider username and password) to login server 122 and requests that the social network application 134a be
5 logged into service provider network 120 (302). For example, if the social network client application 134a is an instant messaging application, the user may invoke the instant messaging application and provide the service provider username and password to the instant messaging application using an interface of the instant messaging application. This may be performed by the user in anticipation of registering with web server 112 or
10 may be performed simply to use the instant messaging application to engage in instant messaging with other users. As described above, social network application 134a may, alternatively or additionally, be implemented as a plug-in for web browser 132a. In such a case, social network client application 134a may be invoked when web browser 132a is invoked.

15 Login server 122 then authenticates the credentials and, assuming the credentials are authentic, logs social network client application 134a into service provider network 120 (304). Once login server 122 logs in social network client application 134a, login server 122 sends a response back to social network client application 134a indicating that the login was successful (306).

20 Web browser 132a then requests the registration page (an example is shown in FIG. 5A) from web server 112 (308). Web server 112 returns the registration web page 350 (which includes social network registration code) to web browser 132a (310), which renders the registration web page (312).

25 Referring to FIG. 3D, web page 350 may include a mechanism, such as a checkbox 352, that allows the user of client system 130a to indicate that his or her social network information maintained by service provider network 120 should be associated with the account on web server 112. Web page 350 also includes text fields 354 and 356 that allow the user to enter his or her name, text boxes 358 and 360 that allow the user to establish a third party username and password by entering them into text boxes 358 and
30 360, respectively, and a text box 362 that allows the user to enter his or her e-mail

address. Once the user has entered this information, he or she may select "submit" button 364 to complete registration by sending this registration information to web server 112.

The social network registration code is executed when the user indicates that the social network information should be associated with the account on web server 112, for example, by selecting checkbox 352. The social network registration code may be implemented in, for example, javascript or another scripting language supported by web browser 132b, or may be implemented, for example, as an ActiveX control or Java applet.

Referring again to FIGS. 3A-3C, when executed, the social network registration code passes a request for a social network id to social network client application 134a (314). The social network registration code may pass the request, for example, using an interprocess communication protocol. Alternatively, social network client application 134b may implement a server, such as a web server, that listens at a specified port on client system 130b. In such a case, the social network registration code may pass the request to the server by sending a hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) or other protocol request to the server at the open port.

The request passed to social network client application 134a may include a unique identifier for web server 112, such as the uniform resource locator (URL) for web server 112. Social network client application 134a then requests a social network id from social network server 124 (316). To do so, social network client application 134a may send to social network server 124 the unique identifier for web server 112 and the service provider username used by social network client application 124 to log onto service provider network 120. Social network client application 124 may do so, for example, by using an application programming interface (API) provided for social network server 124. The API may implement a function similar to the following: `getSocialNetworkID(current_username, URL)`, where `current_username` is equal to the service provider username used by social network client application 134a to log into service provider network 120 and `URL` is equal to the unique identifier of web server 112. Social network client application 134a may call such a function to obtain the social network id from social network server 124.

Social network server 124 then generates a unique social network id and associates that social network id with the service provider username used by social

network client application 134a to log onto service provider network 120 (318). Social network server 124 may generate a social network id that is unique from other social network ids, and is specific to web server 112. For example, social network server 124 may apply a hash function that generates unique ids to a concatenation of the web server URL and service provider username. Accordingly, if the user of client system 130a visits another web server and associates the social network information with the different web server, a different, unique social network id will be created specifically for that different server and associated with the service provider username. In other words, a particular service provider username may have different social network ids for each different website. This process of having the browser connect from the client via the social network application, may prevent the third party service provider from being able to directly determine the service provider username and may thereby afford the user a measure of security and anonymity. The inclusion of a site identifier to generate the unique social network id may prevent other web sites from copying data in an attempt to spoof the social network.

After generating the social network id, social network server 124 returns the social network id to social network client application 134a (320), which in turn returns the social network id to the social network registration code (322). The social network registration code may, for example, store the social network id in a variable that is returned to web server 112.

As the social network registration code obtains the social network id, the user may enter a username and password for web server 112 (that is, a third party username and password), and provide other registration information, by entering such information into text boxes 354, 356, and 362 on web page 350. The user then may submit this information and complete registration, for example, by selecting submit button 364 on registration web page 350. After the user selects the submit button, web browser 132a submits the information entered into text boxes 354-362, along with the social network id, to web server 112 (324).

Web server 112 then generates an account for the user and stores the registration information in the account, along with the social network id (326). While not shown in FIGS. 3A-3C, when a user subsequently wishes to access content or services provided by

web server 112, a login web page is obtained from web server 112 and the user enters his or her third party username and password into the login web page and submits these credentials to web server 112. Once logged in, the user can access the content or services provided by web server 112, such as adding content to web pages or communicating with other users of web server 112.

FIGS. 4A-4C, collectively, show an example of communications and a process 400 that may be performed by web server 112, web browser 132b, social network client 134b, login server 122, and social network server 124 when the user of client system 130b retrieves a web page from web server 112. As with process 300, in process 400 social network client application 134b logs into service provider network 120. To do so, social network client application 134b sends the credentials (e.g., a service provider username and password) for the user of client system 130b to login server 122 and requests that the social network application 134b be logged into service provider network 120 (402). Login server 122 then authenticates the credentials and, assuming the credentials are authentic, logs social network client application 134b into service provider network 120 (404) and sends a response back to social network client application 134b indicating that the login was successful (406).

Web browser 132b then requests a web page (examples are shown in FIGS. 6A-7C) from web server 112 (408), and web server 112 returns the web page 450 (410). The web page retrieved may include the username or other contact information for, and/or content added by users, such as the user of client system 132a. For users, such as the user of client system 132a, that have associated their social network information with their account for web server 112, the content added by these users, or the contact information for these users, has the user's corresponding social network id associated with the content or contact information.

Web pages are typically written in the hypertext markup language (HTML) or other markup language such as the extensible markup language (XML). In such languages, tags are used to define how a web browser should display the content of the web page. One method of associating the social network id with content or contact information is to set the "id" attribute of a tag surrounding the added content or contact information equal to the users social network id.

The following is a simple example of a portion of the HTML of a web page using such a technique to associate a social network id with the content added by the corresponding user:

```
<p id=235678>Hello Everyone!</p>
```

In this example, the "id" attribute of the <p> tag (which represents a paragraph) is set equal to a social network id of "235678," which, for example, may be the social network id for the user of client system 132a.

In addition to having social network ids associated with added content or contact information, the retrieved web page includes social network display code, which, similarly to the social network registration code, may be implemented, for example, in javascript or another scripting language, or may be implemented, for example as an ActiveX control or Java applet. After web browser 132b receives the web page, web browser 132b begins rendering the web page (412), which executes the social network display code. For example, if javascript is used, then the social network display code may be executed in response to the "onLoad" event.

When executed, the social network registration code passes a request for social network information to social network client application 134b (414). As with the social network registration code, the social network display code may pass the request, for example, using an interprocess communication protocol or by sending a request to server implemented by the social network client application 134b.

The request passed to social network client application 134a includes one or more of the social network ids, and may specify a type of social network information requested, depending on how the web page is to be modified. For example, the social network display code may highlight content added by users within a certain number of degrees of separation, or may modify the page to reflect the degrees of separation. In such a case, only the degrees information needs to be request. Alternatively, or additionally, for example, the social network display code may modify the web page to display the pathway between two users. In such a case, the social network display code may request the path information (i.e., which users connect the two users and how). As another example, the social network display code may highlight contact information for, and/or content created by, users with particularly good reputations. The social network display

code may alternatively or additionally hide contact information for, or content created by, users with bad reputations. In another scenario, the social network display code may reorder the content such that content created by users with good reputations is shown first. In such instances, the social network display code may request the reputation information.

Social network client application 134a then requests the social network information from social network server 124 (416). To do so, social network client application 134a may send social network server 124 the social network ids provided by the social network display code, the service provider username used by social network client application 124 to log onto service provider network 120, and other information as necessary. Social network client application 124 may do so, for example, by using an API provided for social network server 124. Depending on the information requested by the social network display code, different types of information may be accessed through the API. For example, the API may have a number of different functions that can be called based on the information requested by the social network display code. For example, the API may have the functions similar to the following:

- `isDegrees (current_username, site_id, sn_id, degrees)`, where `current_username` is a service provider username, `site_id` uniquely identifies the third party service, `sn_id` is an array of one or more social network ids, and `degrees` is a number. This function may return a boolean for each social network id indicating whether the service provider username associated with the social network id and the “current_username” are within the number of degrees of separation specified by “degrees.”
- `getPath (current_username, site_id, sn_id)`, where `current_username` is a service provider username, `site_id` uniquely identifies the third party service, and `sn_id` is an array of one or more social network ids. This function may return for each social network id an object containing the path between the service provider username associated with the social network id and the “current_username.”
- `getDegrees (current_username, site_id, sn_id)`, where `current_username` is a service provider username, `site_id` uniquely identifies the third party service,

and `sn_id` is an array of one or more social network ids. This function may return for each social network id a number indicating the degrees of separation between the service provider username associated with the social network id and the "current_username."

Thus, depending on the information needed, social client network application 134b may call the appropriate function and pass the service provider username used by social network application 134b to log into the service provider network through the `current_username` variable, pass the social network ids provided to social network client application 134b by social network display code through the variable `sn_id` equal, and, if needed, pass a number of degrees of separation requested by social network display code through the variable `degrees`. The unique `site_id` identifier may also be passed to social network server 124 in order to verify that the social network ids were actually registered with the site for which the social network code and/or social network client application is requesting information.

Social network server 124 then uses the social network ids to determine the corresponding service provider usernames. Using the determined usernames and the username provided by social network client application 134b, social network server 124 then determines the requested social network information using, for example, a social network list, such as the one shown in FIG. 2B (418).

Social network server 124 then returns the requested social network information to social network client application 134b (420), which in turn returns the requested social network information to the social network display code (422). Based on the requested social network information, the social network client code modifies the display of the web page. To do so, for example, the social network code may access the document object model (DOM) of the web page and modify nodes of the DOM as appropriate to modify the web page based on the social network information. For example, when the "id" attribute in a tag surrounding content added by a user is set to the user's social network id, the social network display code may access the corresponding node using the social network id. After accessing the node, for instance, the social network display code may move the node (thereby changing where the content is displayed on the page). The social

network display code may add highlighting or perform other style changes to the node, or a child node that represents the added content.

There are a number of ways a page can be modified based on social network information. For example, as described above, the position of content added to a web page by users may be changed based on the social network information. Thus, for instance, content added by users not in the viewing user's social network may be hidden, or moved towards the bottom of the web page. The content added by users may be ordered on the web page according to the number of degrees of separation between the users and the viewing user, by the social network reputations for the content authors, or based on the link strength between relationships in the social network.

As another example, the added content or contact information of a user may be modified to reflect the social network information. For example, a visual cue may be associated with the content or contact information to indicate the degrees of separation between the viewing user and the author of the content or the user corresponding to the contact information, and/or the reputation of the content author. For instance, an icon may be displayed next to the contact information or content, or a color may be associated with the contact information or content. The color may be associated, for example, by highlighting or changing the color of the contact information (e.g., the second user's screen name or e-mail address) or added content. The color may directly indicate the degrees of separation between the users by corresponding to a particular number of degrees. For instance, green may correspond to one degree of separation, while red corresponds to two degrees of separation. In another case, the color of the icon may represent the reputation of the user to which it is linked. As yet another example, the pathway between the viewing user and the author of the added content or the user corresponding to displayed contact information may be displayed in the web page, or may be displayed in a pop-up web page that is invoked if the contact information or content is selected by the viewing user. Thus, the social network display code may modify the web page to provide a pop-up that displays the pathway when the contact information or content is selected.

As an example of one way in which the social network display code may modify web page 450, FIG. 5A shows web page 450 rendered in browser 132b without being

modified, while FIG. 5B shows web page 450 modified according to social networking information. In this example, web page 450 provides access to newsgroups, such as the USENET newsgroups.

Referring to FIG. 5A, web page 450 includes a section 510 that includes a link 512 and links 514. Selecting link 512 retrieves a web page that allows the user to browse the various newsgroups and select one newsgroup to view the posts to that newsgroup. Links 514 reflect recently viewed newsgroups and, when one of links 514 is selected, the corresponding newsgroup is displayed.

Web page 450 also includes a section 520 that displays headers 524 for posts to the currently selected newsgroup. A title 522 displays the name of the currently selected newsgroup.

There are three headers 524 shown, header 524a, 524b, and 524c. Header 524a is listed first (at the top), header 524b is listed second, and header 524 is listed last (at the bottom). Headers 524 display some information about each post, such as, for example, a title for the post, the username or e-mail address of the user who added the post, and a brief synopsis of the post. Headers 524 also include a link to view the entire post. For example, header 524a displays the title "Hello yall, check this out," the e-mail address dl1618@hotmail.com, the synopsis that starts with "Free quick easy money period," and a hyperlink "Read More" that allows the user to view the entire post.

FIG. 5B shows a version of web page 450 that is modified by the social network display code to reorder the headers 524 based on the degrees of separation between the user viewing headers 524 (for example, the user of client system 130b) and the users who added the posts corresponding to headers 524. In this example, the user of client system 130b is connected to the user who added the post corresponding to header 524b and the user who added the post corresponding to header 524c, but is not connected to the user who added the post corresponding to header 524a. In addition, the user of client system 130b is connected to the user who added the post corresponding to header 524b by fewer degrees of separation than the user that added the post corresponding to header 524c.

Accordingly, the social network display code, after receiving the degrees of separation information, has modified the order in which headers 524 are displayed. Social network display code has modified headers 524 such that header 524b is displayed

first (at the top) because the fewest number of degrees of separation exist between the user of client system 130b and the user that added the post corresponding to header 524b. In addition, header 524c is listed second and header 524a is listed last because the user of client system 130b is not connected to the user that added the post corresponding to header 524a.

As other examples, FIGS. 6A-6C show various ways in which a web page 600 may be modified according to social networking information. In these examples, web page 600 provides access to an auction on an auction web site.

Referring to FIG. 6A, web page 600 includes a title 610 that describes the item being auctioned. Web page 600 also includes a section 620 that provides information about the auction, such as the starting bid, the time left until the auction is over, the location of the item being auctioned, where the seller is willing to ship the item, and the shipping cost of the item being auctioned. A button 622 allows a user to place a bid on the item being auctioned.

A section 630 includes information about the seller of the item. Section 630 includes hyperlinks 632 that allow the user to access to access feedback comments added by other users who have bought items from the seller, to send a question to the seller, and to view other items for sale or auction by the seller. Section 630 also displays the date 634 when the seller became a member of the auction site and a feedback rating 636, which may be based on negative or positive comments the seller has received from other users.

Contact information 638 for the seller is also displayed in section 630. In this case, the contact information is the third party username for the seller (the example "Eric" being shown). The social network display code has modified web page 600 to display an icon 638a next to contact information 638. Icon 638a displays the number of degrees of separation between the user viewing web page 450 (for example, the user of client system 130b) and the seller.

Referring to FIG. 6B, in one implementation, web page 600 also is modified so that a user is able to invoke a pop-up window 640 that displays the pathway 642 between the user and the seller. Window 640 can be invoked, for example, by selecting icon 638a. Window 640 represents the user viewing web page as "You," and represents the

intermediate entities and the seller by their respective service provider usernames. In the example shown, the user (indicated by "You") is linked to User2, who in turn is linked to the seller, whose service provider username is User3.

For privacy concerns, some users may not want to have their information displayed in a pathway, such as the pathway 642. To accommodate such concerns, some implementations may permit users to opt out of having their information displayed in a pathway that connects a user to a linked user. For a user who has opted out of having information shown, pathway 642 may be modified, for example, by changing the user's screenname to "unknown," for example.

Referring to FIG. 6C, in another implementation, web page 600 also is modified so that a user is able to invoke a pop-up window 650 that displays profile information for the seller stored on service provider network 120. Social network display code may request such profile information from social network client application 134b, which in turn retrieves such information from social network server 124 or another server. Window 650 can be invoked, for example, by selecting icon 638a. Window 650 includes a section 652 that presents profile information for the seller stored by service provider network 120, such as the seller's name, job title, addresses, phone numbers, and interests.

Using an architecture such as the one shown in FIGS. 3A and 4A, where social network client application 134b executing on a client system 130b retrieves social network information and the content is modified based on the social network information using social network display code in the web page, may provide improved scalability as compared to an architecture in which web server 112 retrieves social network information, such as the one describe below with respect to FIG. 7A. The improved scalability may allow web server 112 to handle larger numbers of users at the same computing power of web server 112. Architectures in which web server 112 or another server on third party service provider network 110 retrieves social network information may, however, be more desirable depending on how social network information is used to modify the content or services of the third party service provider network 110.

Referring to FIGS. 7A and 7B, in another implementation, web server 112 may request the social network information from social network server 122 and modify the web page based on this social network information before the web page is sent to web

browser 132b. If the user who is requesting the web page, such as the user of client system 130b, has also registered with web server 112 using the process and communications described with respect to FIGS. 3A-3D, then web server 112 may also be storing a social network id for that user. That is, for example, web server 112 may have stored a social network id for the user of client system 130a and a social network id for the user of client system 130b. The user of client system 130b may log onto web server 112 before requesting a web page, so as to thereby allow web server 112 to identify and access the social network id of the user of client system 130b. Accordingly, if the user of client system 130b uses web browser 132b to request a web page that contains content added by, or contact information for, the user of client system 132a, web server 112 may access the social network ids for both of these users, and use the social network ids to request social network information from social network server 122. Web server 112 then may modify the web page based on this social network information and send the modified web page to web browser 132b.

More particularly, FIGS. 7A and 7B, collectively, show examples of communications and a process 700 for such an implementation. The user may use web browser 132b to log onto web server 112 and request a web page that contains content added by, or contact information for, other users, such as the user of client system 132a (702). The content added by the users, or the contact information for the users, may be associated with the social network id of the corresponding user. The social network ids may be associated with the content or contact information by being embedded in the HTML of the web page, for example, by using the "id" attribute as described above. Alternatively, web server 112 may use a program, such as a common gateway interface (CGI) script, to generate the HTML or other markup for the web page, and the other components the web page (e.g., scripts). In such a situation, the content or contact information may be stored in a database or other storage until the web page is requested. When the web page is requested, the CGI script accesses the content or contact information to dynamically generate the web page. In such a situation, the social network id may be associated with the content or contact information in the database or other storage.

Web server 112 then requests the social network information from social network server 124 (704). For example, the request for the web page may be directed to a program, such as a CGI script, executing on web server 112. When the request for the web page is received, the CGI script then accesses the social network id of the requesting user and the social network ids associated with the content or contact information to be included in the web page (for example, by accessing the HTML or other mark-up of the web page or by accessing a database that stores the content or contact information). The CGI script then may send to social network server 124 the social network ids, and other information as necessary. The CGI script may do so, for example, by using an API provided for social network server 124. Functions similar to those described above may be implemented by the API. For example, the API may have the functions similar to the following:

- isDegrees (user_sn_id, site_id, sn_id, degrees), where user_sn_id is the social network id for the user requesting the web page, site_id uniquely identifies the third party service, sn_id is an array of one or more social network ids associated with the content or contact information, and degrees is a number. This function may return a boolean for each social network id in the sn_id array indicating whether the social network id in the array and the social network id of the user requesting the web page are within the number of degrees of separation specified by "degrees."
- getPath (user_sn_id, site_id, sn_id), where user_sn_id is the social network id for the user requesting the web page, site_id uniquely identifies the third party service, and sn_id is an array of one or more social network ids. This function may return for each social network id in the array an object containing the path between the social network id in the array and the social network id of the user requesting the web page.
- getDegrees (user_sn_id, site_id, sn_id), where user_sn_id is the social network id for the user requesting the web page, site_id uniquely identifies the third party service, and sn_id is an array of one or more social network ids. This function may return for each social network id in the array a number

indicating the degrees of separation between the social network id in the array and the social network id of the requesting user.

Social network server 124 then uses the social network ids to determine the corresponding service provider usernames. Using the usernames, social network server 124 then determines the requested social network information using, for example, a social network list, such as the one shown in FIG. 2B (706), and returns the requested social network information to web server 112 (e.g., to the CGI script executing on web server 112, if implemented) (708).

Web server 112 then modifies the web page based on the social network information (710). For example, if a program such as a CGI script is implemented, the CGI script may modify the HTML or other markup of the web page based on the social network information. Alternatively, the CGI script may dynamically generate the HTML or other markup for the web page and other components of the web page, modifying the web page based on the social network information as the web page is generated. The web page may be modified in the ways described above, such as reordering, highlighting, or deleting content or contact information, inserting social network information into the web page, or making social network information or other information available in, for example, a pop-up window. Web server 112 then sends the modified web page 750 to web browser 132b (712), which then renders the web page 750 (714).

Referring to FIGS. 8A and 8B, in other implementations, third party service provider network 110 may maintain a social network for the members of third party online service provider network 110 (referred to as a third party social network), and may use the third party social network in providing services or content to the members of online service provider network 110. In addition, the third party service provider network 110 may modify these services or content based on the social network maintained by online service provider network 120. That is, a user may be a member of both the third party social network maintained by third party online service provider 110 and a member of the social network maintained by online service provider 120.

In general, if the user of third party network 110, such as the user of client system 130b, has registered using the process and communications described with respect to FIGS. 3A-3D, then third party online service provider network 110 may also be storing a

social network id for that user. The third party online service provider network 110 may use the social network id to retrieve social network information related to the user from the social network maintained by the service provider network 120. This retrieved social network information may be used to modify the content or services provided by the third party service provider network 110 based on the third party social network.

In particular, with respect to FIG. 8A, the third party online service provider uses social network information to inform filtering of e-mail. In this implementation, third party online service provider network 110 includes an e-mail server 112a in place of (or in addition to) web server 112. Third party online service provider network 110 also includes a social network server 114 (referred to as a third party social network sever), which may be similar to social network server 122, except that third party social network server 114 maintains social network information for the members of third party online service provider network 110. The user of client system 130b may use an e-mail client 130b-1 instead of web browser 132b to access e-mail from e-mail server 112a.

Third party online service provider network 110 may use social network information, of example, to create a trusted list of senders for a user, such as the user of client system 130b, and use the trusted list to inform filtering of the e-mails sent to the user. For example, the e-mail server may use the trusted list as a white list to allow e-mail from e-mail addresses on the trusted list, while blocking e-mail from e-mail addresses not on the trusted list. Methods of filtering e-mail or other communications based on trusted lists developed from social network information is further described in U.S. Application Serial No. 10/746,232, filed December 29, 2003, and titled "Degrees of Separation for Handling Communications," which is incorporated herein in its entirety for all purposes.

FIGS. 8A and 8B show examples of communications and a process 800 for such an implementation. E-mail server 112a may create the trusted list for a user, such as the user of client system 130b, by first requesting, from social network server 114, the e-mail addresses for other users within a certain number of degrees of separation from the user (802). Social network server 114 then requests the social network information from social network server 124 (804). To do so, social network server 114 may access the social network id of the user and send to social network server 124 the social network id, and other information as necessary. Social network server 114 may do so, for example,

by using an API provided for social network server 124. For example, the API may have a function similar to the following: `getEmails(sn_id, degrees)`, where `sn_id` is the social network id for the user and `degrees` is the number of degrees of separation requested by e-mail server 112a. This function may return an array of the e-mail addresses for users within the specified degrees of separation.

Social network server 124 uses the social network id to determine the associated username. The associated username is then used to determine the users within the specified degrees of separation, and their corresponding e-mail addresses (806). Once determined, social network server 124 returns the e-mail addresses to social network server 114 (808).

Social network server 114 returns to e-mail server 112a the e-mail addresses retrieved from social network server 124, in addition to the e-mail addresses of users within the third party social network that are within the specified degrees of separation (810). E-mail server 112a uses the e-mail addresses to generate the trusted list and to filter or otherwise modify the e-mails received for the user accordingly (812). When e-mail client application 132b-1 subsequently requests the e-mails for the user of client system 130b (814), e-mail server 816 provides the filtered or otherwise modified e-mails to e-mail client application 132b-1, which displays them to the user (816).

A number of other implementations are possible depending on the content or services provided by third party service provider 110, and the social network information made available through the API for social network server 122. For example, in an implementation similar to that shown in FIG. 8A, the third party service provider network may provide general social network services, such as those provided by Friendster, Inc. of Silicon Valley, California (located at www.friendster.com). Such services allow a user to view profiles and access content maintained by members of the user's social network, in addition to allowing the user to communicate with members of the user's social network. Through the API provided for social network server 122, information may be retrieved for the members in the user's social network maintained by online service provider 120, and the information may be used to link those members, through the user, to the members in the user's social network maintained by social network server 122. Such information may include profiles or content maintained by these members and/or contact information

for these members. This may allow members of the user's third party social network maintained by third party service provider 110 to be connected, through the user, to members of the user's social network maintained by online service provider 120, and may allow members of the third party social network to navigate to, interact with, or view information about the members of the user's social network maintained by online service provider 120, and may provide mechanisms for the members of the user's third party social network to communicate with the members of the user's social network maintained by online service provider 120. For example, a member of the user's third party social network may be able to access profile information for a member of the user's social network maintained by service provider 120. The profile information may contain contact information for the member, such as an e-mail address for an e-mail account provided by service provider 120.

Instead of showing the member's contact information, the third party service provider network 110 may provide a form, such as a web form, for the member of the third party social network to enter and send messages to the other member. Once the member submits the message, the third party service provider network 110 may send the message using, for example, the other member's e-mail address for an e-mail account provided by service provider 120.

In addition, one user in a social network may try to access content maintained by another user in the social network. For example, a first user may attempt to access a calendar maintained by a second user. Whether the user can access the calendar, or what information is shown on the calendar, may be based on the types of relationships connecting the first user to the second user (e.g., whether the relationships are family relationships, friend relationships, or business relationships). Such techniques are more fully described in U.S. Application Serial No. _____, with attorney docket number 06975-668001, filed concurrently with this application on March 15, 2005, titled "Social Networking Permissions," and incorporated herein in its entirety for all purposes. The third party online service provider network 110 may communicate with social network server 122 to implement such permissions across the service provider boundaries. For example, a member of the third party social network may be connected to a member of the social network maintained by online service provider network 120 through a user that

is a member of both networks. The member of the third party social network may use the services provided by third party service provider to attempt to access content maintained by the member of the online service provider 120. Third party social network server 114 and social network server 114 may communicate to determine the type of access based on the types of relationships connecting the members, and to provide the appropriate type of access to the requested content.

The techniques described above are not limited to any particular hardware or software configuration. Rather, they may be implemented using hardware, software, or a combination of both. The methods and processes described may be implemented as computer programs that are executed on programmable computers comprising at least one processor and at least one data storage system. The programs may be implemented in a high-level programming language and may also be implemented in assembly or other lower level languages, if desired.

Any such program will typically be stored on a computer-usable storage medium or device (e.g., CD-Rom, RAM, or magnetic disk). When read into the processor of the computer and executed, the instructions of the program cause the programmable computer to carry out the various operations described above.

Furthermore, elements of different implementations may be combined, deleted, added, supplemented or modified to yield further implementations. In addition, actions or communications do not necessarily need to occur in the order in which they are depicted. Accordingly, other implementations are within the scope of the following claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for using social network information from a first online service provider network to modify content or services provided by a second online service provider network, the method comprising:
 - 5 sending a request for social network information related to a user to a first online service provider network:
 - receiving the social network information related to the user from the first online service provider network; and
 - 10 modifying content or services provided by the second online service provider network based on the social network information.
 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving a social network id associated with a username for the user established at the first online service provider network, wherein sending the request for social network information related to the user to the first
15 online service provider network comprises sending the social network id associated with the username for the user at the first online service provider network, such that the first online service provider network determines the social network information related to the user based on the social network id.
 - 20 3. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving a social network id associated with a username for a second user established at the first online service provider network, wherein:
 - the social network id is received as part of a web page provided by the second online service provider network, the social network id being associated with content in
25 the web page added by the second user or contact information for the second user in the web page;
 - sending the request for social network information related to the user to the first online service provider network comprises sending the social network id and a username for the user established at the first online service provider network, such that the first
30 online service provider network determines the social network information related to the

user based on the social network id and the username of the user; and
modifying the content or services provided by the second online service provider
comprises modifying the web page based on the social network information.

5 4. The method of claim 3 wherein modifying the web page based on the social
network information comprises accessing the content added to the web page by the
second user or the contact information for the second user in the web page using the
social network id and highlighting the content added to the web page by the second user
or the contact information for the second user in the web page.

10 5. The method of claim 3 wherein modifying the web page based on the social
network information comprises accessing the content added to the web page by the
second user using the social network id and changing the position of the content added to
the web page by the second user.

15 6. The method of claim 3 wherein:
the social network information comprises a number of degrees of separation
between the user and the second user; and
modifying the web page based on the social network information comprises
20 displaying a visual cue in proximity to the content added to the web page by the second
user or the contact information for the second user in the web page, the visual cue
indicating the number of degrees of separation between the user and the user requesting
the web page.

25 7. The method of claim 3 wherein:
the social network information comprises a number of degrees of separation
between the user and the second user; and
accessing the content added to the web page by the second user using the social
network id and changing the position of the content added to the web page by the second
30 user based on the number of degrees of separation between the user and the second user.

8. The method of claim 3 wherein:

the social network information comprises a value representing a reputation of the second user among members of a social network including the user; and

modifying the web page based on the social network information comprises
5 displaying a visual cue in proximity to the content added to the web page by the second user or the contact information for the second user in the web page, the visual cue indicating the value of the reputation for the second user.

9. The method of claim 3 wherein:

10 the social network information comprises a value representing the reputation of the second user among members of a social network including the user; and
modifying the web page based on the social network information comprises
accessing the content added to the web page by the second user using the social network
id and changing the position of the content added to the web page by the second user
15 based on the value representing the reputation of the second user.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein the second online service provider network comprises a server, the method further comprising:

logging into the first online service provider network under a username for the
20 user established at the first online service provider network;

sending the username and an identifier of the server to the first online service provider network such that the first online service provider network generates a social network id based on the username and identifier and associates the social network id with the username;

25 receiving the social network id from the first online service provider network; and
sending the social network id to the server such that the server associates the social network id with an account for the user maintained by the second online service provider network.

30 11. The method of claim 10 wherein the server is a web server.

12. The method of claim 2 further comprising:

receiving a request for a web page that contains content added by a second user or contact information for the second user in the web page; and

modifying the content or services provided by the second online service provider
5 comprises modifying the web page based on the social network information.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein:

receiving the social network information related to the user from the first online
social network provider network comprises receiving information regarding members of a first
10 social network including the user maintained by the first online service provider network;
and

modifying the content or services provided by the second online service provider
network based on the social network information comprises modifying content or services
provided by the second online service provider network based on the information
15 regarding members of a first social network including the user maintained by the first
online service provider network

14. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving the social network information related to
the user from the first online service provider network comprises receiving information
20 regarding members of a first social network including the user maintained by the first
online service provider network, the method further comprising:

maintaining a second social network on the second online service provider
network, the second social network having members including the user;

linking the members of the first social network to members of the second social
25 network using the received information regarding members of the first social network.

15. The method of claim 1 wherein the user is a user that has requested the content or
services provided by the second online service provider network.

30 16. The method of claim 1 wherein the user is a user that has added content to the
content or content or services provided by the second online service provider network or

is a user whose contact information is display in the content or services provided by the second online service provider.

17. A social network server maintained on a online service provider network, the
5 social network server comprising:
- a processor;
 - memory that stores instructions for causing the processor to perform the following operations:
 - maintain data indicating one or more social networks for members of the
10 online service provider network;
 - receive a request from a system that is separate from the online service
provider network for social network information related to a user;
 - determine the social network information related to the user based on the
data indicating the one or more social network maps; and
 - 15 making the determined social network information related to the user
accessible to the system that is separate from the online service provider network.

18. The social network server of claim 17 wherein the memory stores further
instructions for causing the processor to perform the following operations:
- 20 receive, from the system that is separate form the online service provider network,
a request for a social network id for the user;
 - generate a social network id for the user;
 - associate the social network id with a username; and
 - send the generated social network id to the system that is separate from the online
25 service provider network.

19. The social network server of claim 18 wherein:
- the request includes the username and an identification of a server maintained on a
second online service provider network; and
 - 30 the instructions for causing the processor to generate the social network id for the
user include instructions for causing the processor to generate the social network id based

on the username and the identification of the server maintained on the second online service provider network.

20. The social network server of claim 18 wherein:

the request from the system that is separate from the online service provider network includes the social network id; and

the instructions for causing the processor to determine the social network information related to the user based on the one or more social network maps includes instructions for causing the processor to determine the social network information related to the user based on the data indicating the one or more social network maps and the social network id.

21. The social network server of claim 17 wherein the system that is separate from the online service provider network is a client system such that the instructions for causing the processor to receive a request from a system that is separate from the online service provider network for social network information related to a user comprise instructions for causing the processor to receive a request from a client system that is separate from the online service provider network for social network information related to a user.

22. The social network server of claim 17 wherein the system that is separate from the online service provider network is a server maintained on a second online service provider network such that the instructions for causing the processor to receive a request from a system that is separate from the online service provider network for social network information related to a user comprise instructions for causing the processor to receive a request from a server maintained on a second online service provider network for social network information related to a user.

23. A computer-usable medium storing a program for using social network information from a first online service provider network to modify content or services provided by a second online service provider network, the programming comprising

instructions for causing a computer to:

send a request for social network information related to a user to a first online service provider network;

5 receive the social network information related to the user from the first online service provider network; and

modify content or services provided by a second online service provider network based on the social network information.

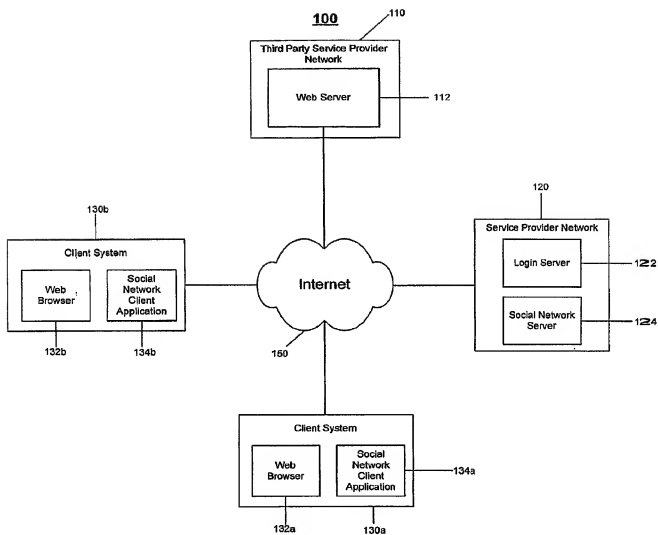
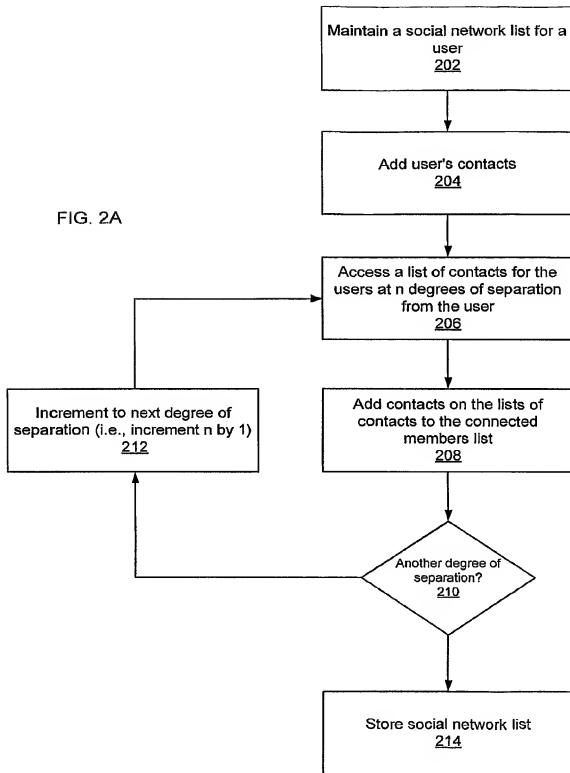


FIG. 1

FIG. 2A



USER 216

Degrees of Separation	User	Whom Connected To
2	User5	User4
1	User4	User1
1	User3	User2
0	User2	User
0	User1	User

FIG. 2B

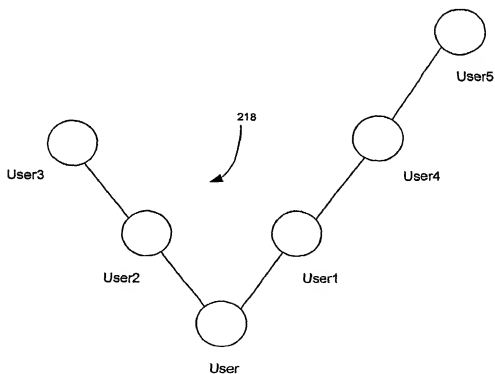
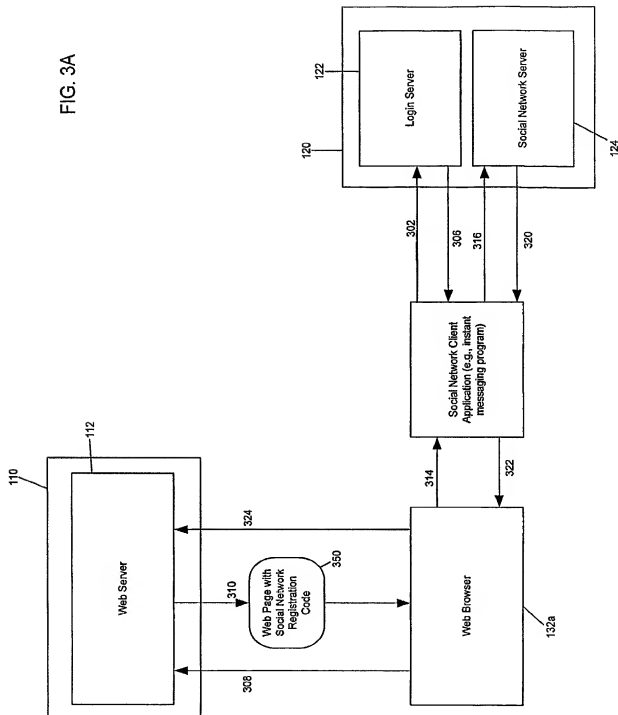


FIG. 2C

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

FIG. 3A



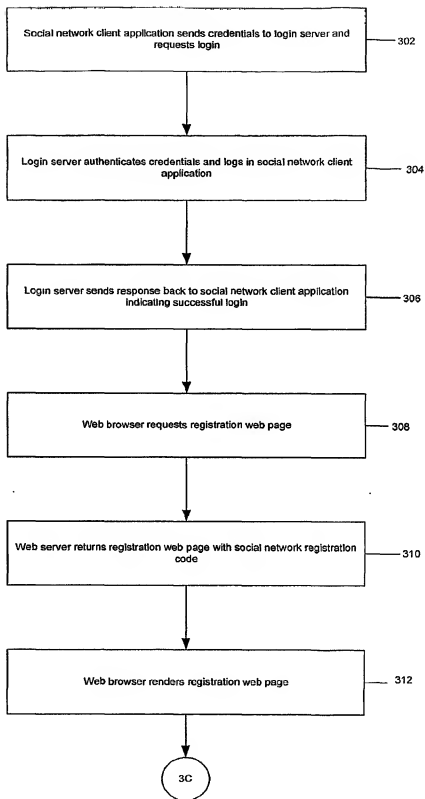
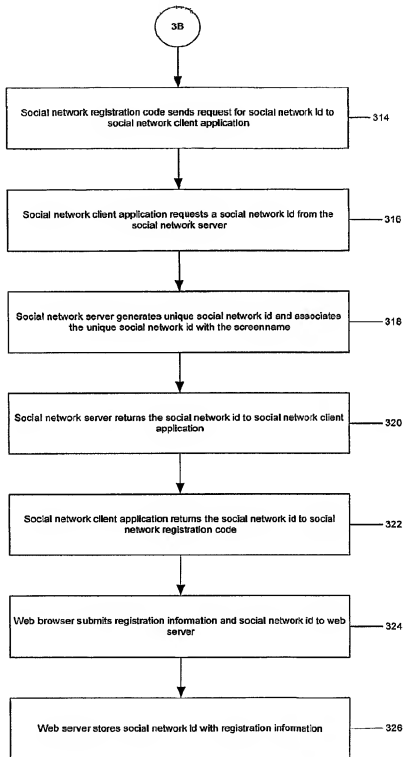
300

FIG. 3B



132a

Registration

☐ Associate my social network information with this account

352 First Name 354 Last Name 356

358 Username 362 E-mail Address

360 Password

364 Submit 350

The diagram shows a registration form within a window labeled 132a. The form has a title 'Registration' and a checkbox labeled 'Associate my social network information with this account'. Below this are six input fields: 'First Name' (352), 'Last Name' (354), 'Username' (358), 'E-mail Address' (362), 'Password' (360), and a 'Submit' button (364). There is also a label 356 pointing to the 'Last Name' field and a label 350 pointing to the 'Submit' button.

FIG. 3D

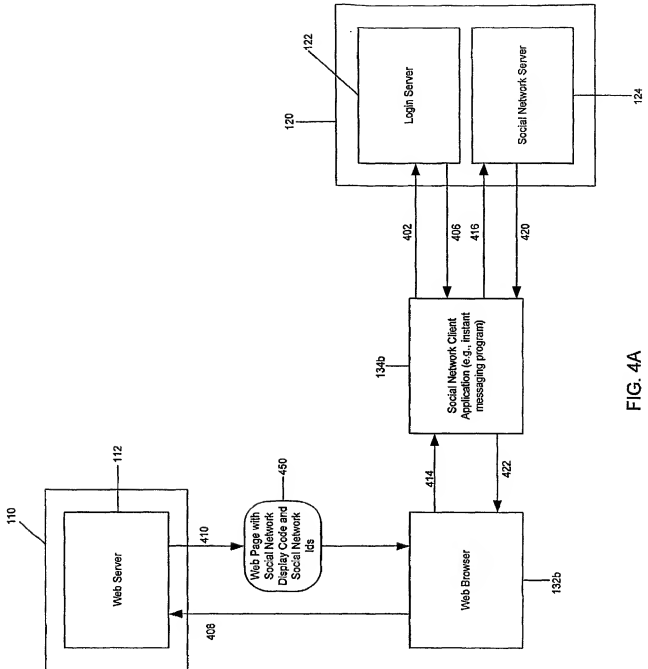


FIG. 4A

400

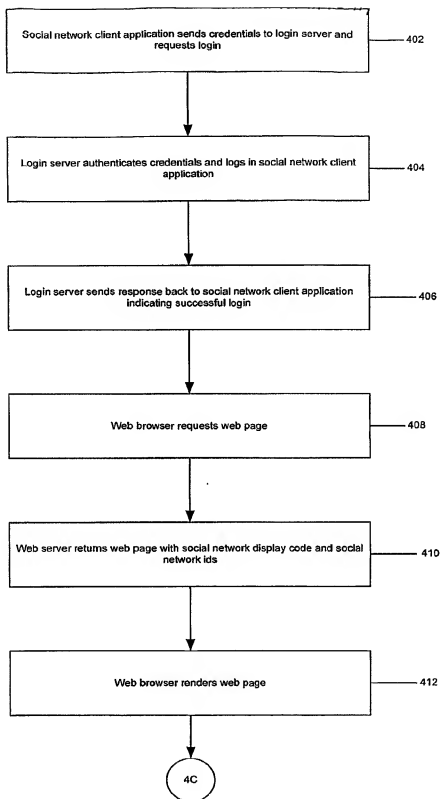


FIG. 4B

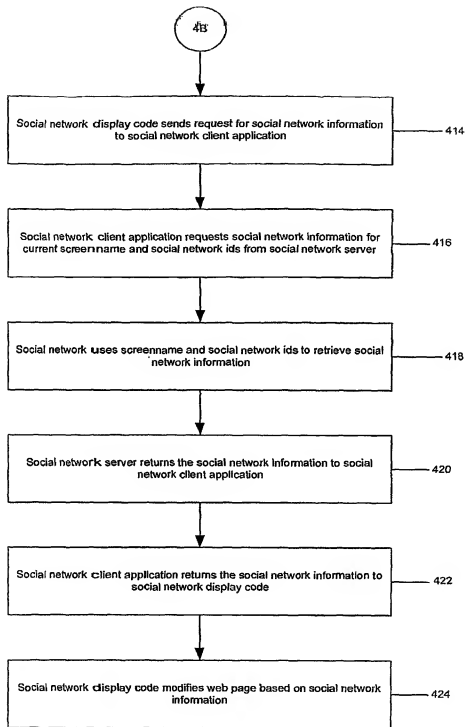


FIG. 4C

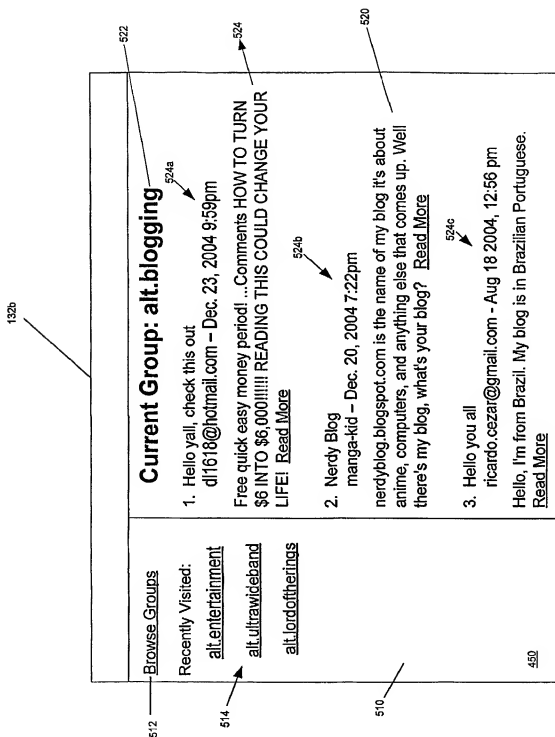


FIG. 5A

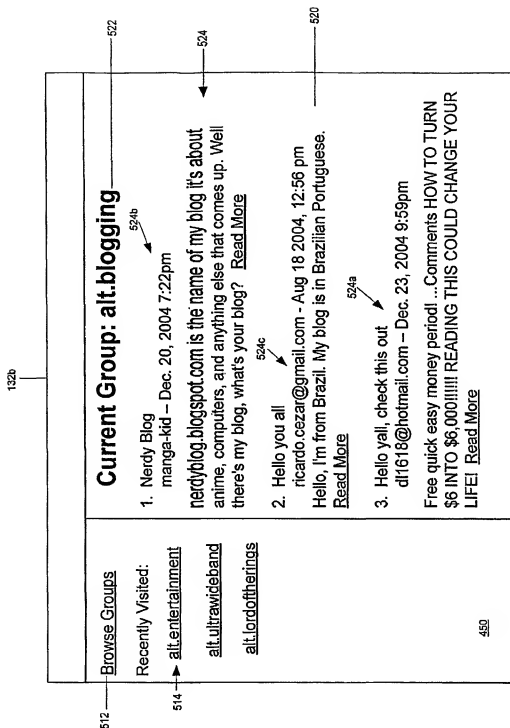


FIG. 5B

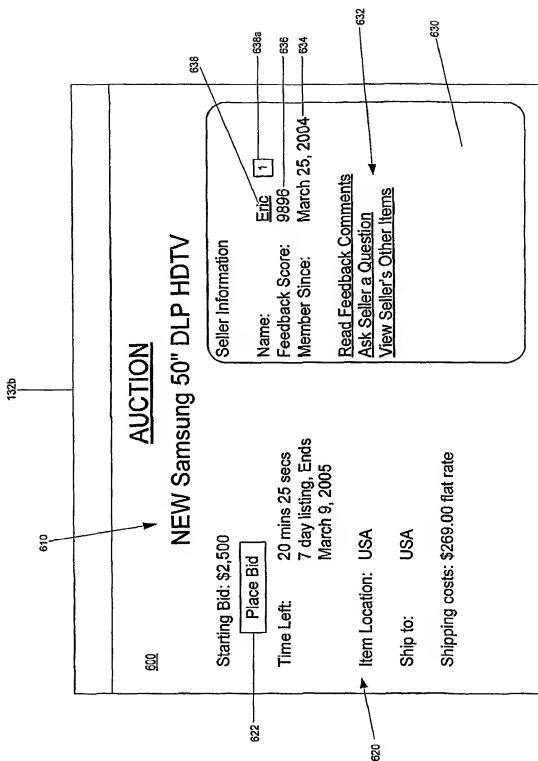


FIG. 6A

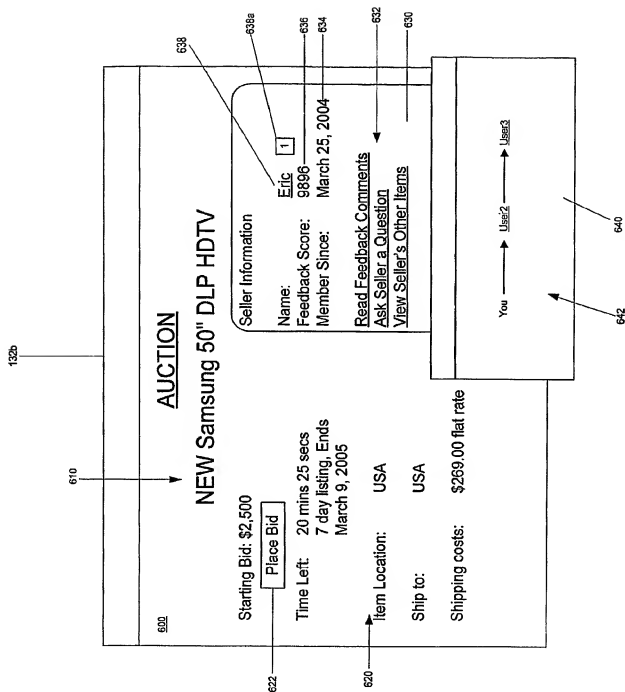


FIG. 6B

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

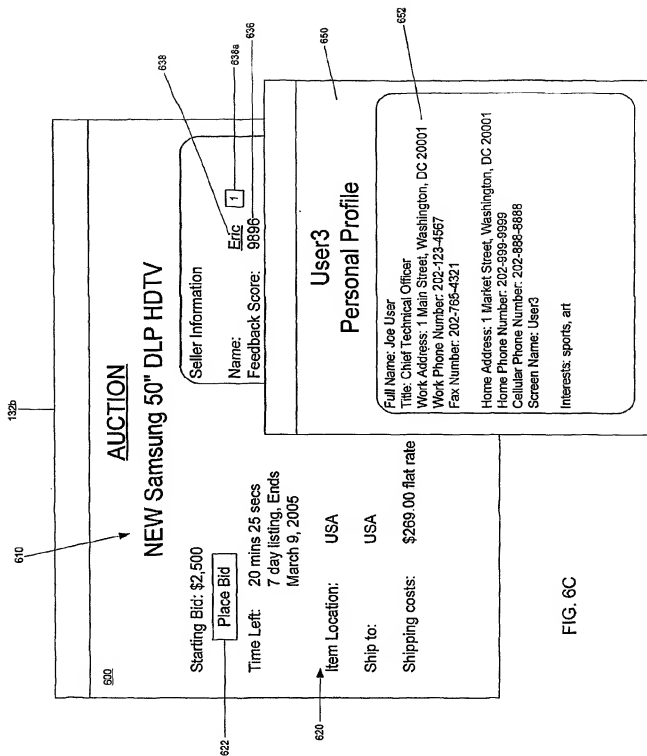


FIG. 6C

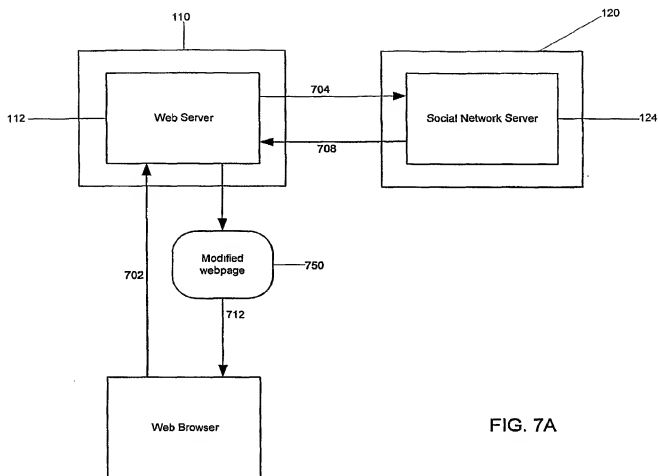


FIG. 7A

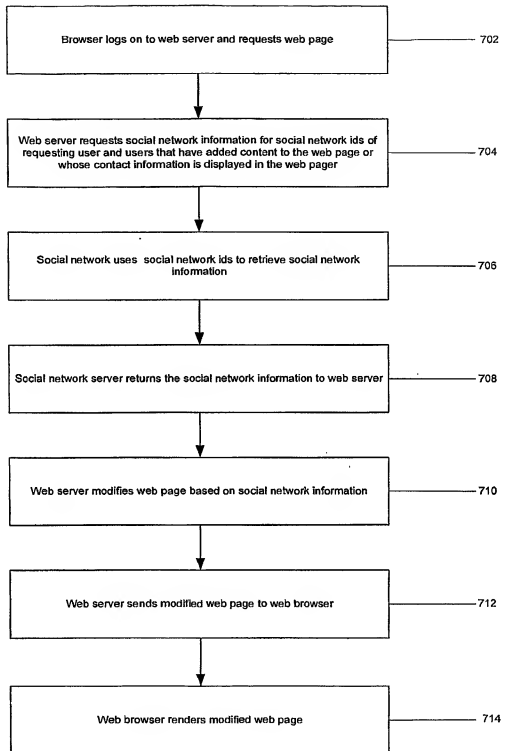


FIG. 7B

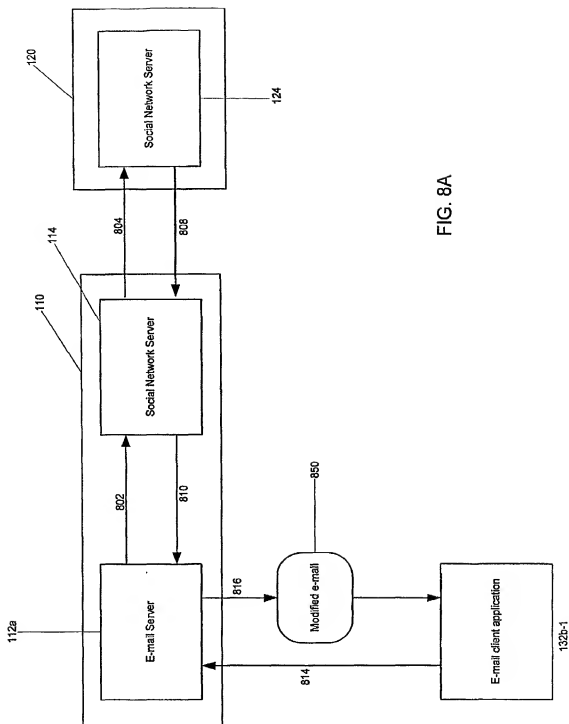


FIG. 8A

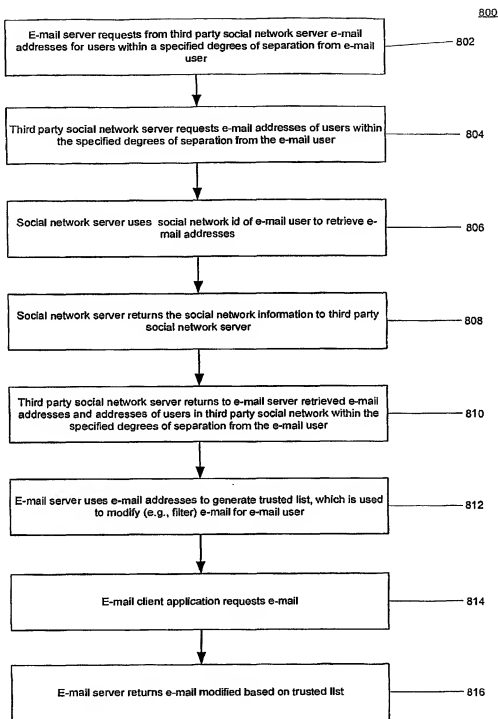


FIG. 8B

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau(43) International Publication Date
29 September 2005 (29.09.2005)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2005/089286 A3(51) International Patent Classification:
G06Q 99/00 (2006.01)(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2005/008476

(22) International Filing Date: 15 March 2005 (15.03.2005)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
60/552,718 15 March 2004 (15.03.2004) US(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **AMERICA ONLINE, INC.** [US/US]; 22000 AOL Way, Dulles, VA 20166 (US).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **GREENBERG, Steven** [US/US]; 6702 Jefferson Blvd, Frederick, MD 21703 (US); **APPEL, Barry** [US/US]; 1003 Crest Lane, McLean, VA 22101 (US).(74) Agent: **RENNER, W., Karl**; Fish & Richardson P.C., 1425 K Street, N.W., 11th Floor, Washington, DC 20005-3500 (US).

(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM,

AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

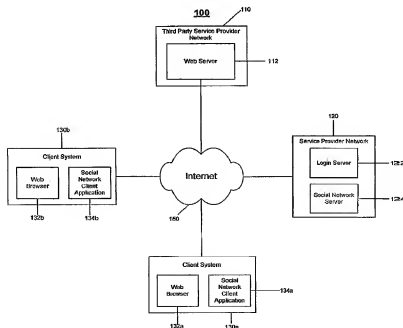
- with international search report
- before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments

(88) Date of publication of the international search report:

21 December 2006

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SHARING SOCIAL NETWORK INFORMATION



(57) Abstract: Social network information may be shared across online service providers. Thus, one online service provider M that maintains a membership separate from a second online service provider N may nevertheless use the social network maintained by the second online service provider N to tailor content and/or services based on such social network information.

WO 2005/089286 A3



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US05/08476

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC: G06Q 99/00(2006.01)

USPC: 705/1

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
U.S.: 705/1

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6,549,937 B1 (Auerbach et al) 15 April 2003 (15.04.2003) all	1-23

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E"	earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&"	document member of the same patent family
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search

18 September 2006 (18.09.2006)

Date of mailing of the international search report

16 OCT 2006

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450

Facsimile No. (571) 273-3201

Authorized officer

John Weiss

Telephone No. 571-272-3600